

The information is aggregated from open online sources and our own practice. In the newsletters, we will update you in brief on human rights violations in numbers and facts.

Saturday 6 April 2024 to Friday 19 April 2024

The human rights crisis in Belarus continues to deepen. The analyzed period was marked by introducing a legislative framework for the persecution of the LGBTQ+ community, prosecution for direct material support of political prisoners, punishing another musician disloyal to the regime, as well as increasing censorship and surveillance. The newly launched Belarus Nations in Transit 2024 [country report](#) reflects political and human rights developments of the past year.

“Non-traditional relationships” equated to pornography

On 12 April 2024, [amendments to the instruction of the Ministry of Culture](#), which regulates the sale and release of erotic products and sexual goods, came into force. The instructions extended the definition of “pornography” to include “non-traditional sexual relations.” By “non-traditional relationships” the authorities understand “homosexuality and lesbian love,” “bisexual relationships,” “polyamory,” “transsexualism.” This legislative change was adopted to create another formal basis for the persecution of LGBTQ+ activists in Belarus. The Criminal Code of Belarus provides for punishment of up to 4 years in prison for distributing pornography – this is the prison term that LGBTQ+ representatives now may face for publicly demonstrating their relationships.

Criminal charges for money transfers to political prisoners

In early April, the press service of the Investigative Committee [announced](#) the initiation of a criminal case against 63-year-old Brest resident Natalya Malets. She is accused of “aiding extremist activity” under Article 361-4 of the Criminal Code for regularly sending money transfers to people in pre-trial detention centers who are accused of “extremist” (politically motivated) crimes. It should be noted that money transfers to prisoners are completely legal from the point of view of Belarusian legislation. The basis of criminal charges against the woman was that she made 125 money transfers *exclusively* to people accused of “extremist” crimes and who were recognized by human rights activists as political prisoners. The woman can face a sentence of up to 6 years in prison.

Another severe punishment for musicians who are disloyal to the authorities

On 12 April 2024, human rights defenders reported that the Oktyabrsky district court of Minsk [sentenced](#) musicians of the popular Belarusian group Nizkiz Alexander Ilyin, Sergei Kulsha, and Dmitry Khalyavkin to 2.5 years of restriction of freedom without referral to a correctional facility. They were accused of “participating in actions that grossly violate public order” under Article 342 of the Criminal Code. The charges were based on the filming of a music video at one of the protest marches in 2020.

Increased digital surveillance and censorship

On 9 April 2024, the Operational Analytical Center (OAC) [published](#) an order according to which the registration of a domain included in the list of “extremist materials” must be revoked. After the adoption of this act, the OAC [seized the domains](#) from various independent information resources that had been locating until that moment in the Belarusian domain zone, in particular “Mediazona Belarus”, “Reform,” “Ex-Press,” “Media-Polesie”, “zbsunion,” “newlife.by,” “intex-press.by,” and others.

On 17 April 2024, the House of Representatives of the National Assembly in the second reading [adopted](#) the draft Law “On Amendments to Laws on Issues of the Investigative Committee”. The document provides the opportunity for Investigative Committee employees to gain constant access to “information resources (systems) containing personal data of citizens” without notifying them.

On 17 April 2024, MTS, the largest telecommunications company in Belarus, [announced](#) that ex-KGB director Vladimir Kozyr was appointed to the position of general director of the company. The company representatives noted that he worked for a long time in law enforcement agencies in the areas of economics and communications. Such nomination may serve as an illustration of the authorities gaining increasing control over telecommunication companies in order to spread state surveillance practices.

New Nations in Transit report

On 11 April 2024, the new Freedom House [Nations in Transit report](#) was launched. According to the report, democratic governance in the observed region declined for the 20th consecutive year in 2023, while Belarus continued to be characterized as a “consolidated authoritarian regime” under the report’s methodology. [The Belarus country report](#) also highlighted some of the government’s repressive techniques to silence dissenters continues to grow and targets Belarusians both at home and abroad, including incommunicado detentions, growing use of “anti-extremism” persecution, and effects of the “passport decree.”

Political prisoners

The total number of political prisoners in Belarus is [1387](#). The number continues to grow daily. As of 19 April 2024, our colleague [Nasta Lojka](#) has been in custody [for 569 days](#).